

An Admixture of Philosophies, Visions, and Ambitions.
-Kent Barrett

There is, I believe, a distinctly American myth, interwoven into the fabric of society, that artists and educators work, develop, or create individually; that there exists a sense of ownership of ideas or creation, rather than what humans naturally engage in; which is to work collectively to build upon existing modes and concepts found all around us.

As John Greene recently stated:

“even though... (we) love the story of a rugged individual who invents a lightbulb out of thin air, via the sweat of his brow, the truth is, that what makes us special is our capacity for collaboration and accumulation of knowledge. But who wants to hear a story about slow progress through iterative change over decades. Well, hopefully, you do.”

Throughout my career, both professionally and academically (for the two are hard for me to compartmentalize; there exists a constant feeding back and forth: each informing, reinforcing, or transforming the other), I have sought, time and time again, to immerse myself within a community and to be in service to...

to be in service to: the people that make up the community,
to be in service to: my fellow artists and audience,
to be in service to: my students and colleagues,
to be in service to: the knowledge we are trying to preserve, transmit, and/or create,
to be in service to: the world we share
and to be in service to: the work we make by building on all that has come before us.

Therefore, it is hard for me to express “My” teaching philosophy, artistic vision, or creative ambition. I believe it is far more honest for me to speak about what “We” have learned, created, taught one another and discovered. This “We” being comprised of the students, colleagues, collaborators and community partners I have had the privilege of being in service to and learn with.

Please note that I state the following as “We” not presuming to speak on behalf of everyone (or *anyone* for that matter) who has so greatly shaped and formed me, the work, or education processes I have been a part of, but rather as a way of paying homage to everything we’ve experienced together and to illustrate the way in which I try to work, teach, learn and live.

Here are some things We have learned:

We have learned that Everyone creates. All of the time. Yet, often times the most fruitful creation is when we make (as Frank Lloyd Wright once said) with our “hands, heart, and mind”.

We have learned that it is important to do more work with, by, for, and about others. It is a lofty habit to get outside of ourselves.

We have learned that the more diverse the backgrounds of our members, the more diverse the expectations or experiences, the more compelling and flourishing the learning and work will be.

We have learned that the visual is instinctual.

We have learned that one of the most difficult lessons, and perhaps most important goals, is to try not to apply one’s values onto another.

We have learned to try to start with the individual, be it student, artist or collaborator: not the class or group as a whole. As each person carries within them their own stories, histories, impulses and intuitions, all of this informs the group, the learning, and the work, and should be coaxed out, in order for genuine creativity to emerge. We have learned that the biggest challenge to overcome with this approach is inefficiency and a result that must constantly seek to combat the derivative.

We have learned that hierarchies are losing their place in the world. Now, we question the boundary of form, medium, or confines of definitions.

We have learned that the word “collaboration” does not always mean that one is in service to another, but rather that the dynamics of power and the voices of creativity are fractured and dispersed amongst a variety of peoples and ideas truly connected to, and invested in, the creation and participation of the learning and work.

We have learned that to truly understand the concept of “engagement” with another, we must rely upon a cyclical process of “gift giving” with time, words, deeds and / or objects, materials, skill sets or experiences. Reciprocity and evolution within this cycle is inherent.

We have learned that every class, every process, every development, should evolve every time. This is not always subtle, but sometimes radical. Every time, the student, the teacher, the artists, the audience, the culture, the context, and often times, the material itself, all change.

We have learned that when a piece is “shown” rather than experienced, the ones who benefit the most are the creators, rather than the viewers. This is akin to showing a picture taken on top of a mountain, rather than being on top of the mountain.

We have learned that movement does not need to be fast, but rather, must be constant. We have learned that the static is the shortcut to the sandcastle; easily consumed and washed away; while the dynamic requires a constant analysis, reframing, and sometimes recreation. Such is life.

We have learned to show, not tell, whenever possible. When we physically create, then an analysis and response can occur; a further sculpting; an embrace of incompleteness.

We have learned that rapid prototyping and slow, long form approaches are both valuable tools that produce different energies which get absorbed into what is created and what is learned.

We have learned to attempt to understand and pay reverence and a critical perspective to where material comes from, both physical and conceptual (textual, visual, personal, etc.). We have learned too, that it is so very important to be mindful of where material goes once our “use” for it has expired.

We have learned that Walter Gropius was wrong to burn all of the classic, traditional books on architecture in the Harvard library. But we have also learned that a strict adherence to our understanding of the past is dangerous and limiting. Like Ivan Illich once stated:

“I live with a sense of profound ambiguity. I can’t do without tradition, but I have to recognize that it’s institutionalization is the root of an evil deeper than any evil I could have known with my unaided eyes and mind.”

We have learned that sincere relevance is to be esteemed above nostalgia or the appropriate. However, the archive should never be lost.

We have learned that performance should reflect the presence in the contemporary moment – often media, collage and authenticity are the language of now.

We have learned that the employment of irony and sarcasm are tools that can be cold and distancing, while sincerity and compassion may seem buffoonish, their capacity for genuine connection are worth the risk.

We have learned that our current culture is driven by sensory experience, now more than ever, rather than textual modalities.

We have learned that abstraction is democratic as long as its intention is not to alienate.

We have learned that it may be time to move beyond “re-presentation” in theatre. But also, as Robert Irwin states, it is important to try to eliminate the “Rorschach-ness” of abstraction.

We have learned that the temporality of liveness is one of the most honest tools we possess. We have learned to embrace this in all forms, echo, magnify and revere this element.

We have learned that the most compelling design is design as performance.

We have learned that design may be alive or dead. Cue Stacks and Playbacks are static, therefore dead. Liveness comes with the unseen but palpable energy of a moment. We have learned that designers may play the energy or electricity of the room, as a musician does their instrument.

We have learned to work with, and accentuate any challenges within a space, architecture, classroom or piece of work.

We have learned to use the local. What’s around? What is immediately available that can be incorporated? Where does it go afterwards? Working with the given architecture, people, materials, cultures and relevant issues of a given space in all that we do.

We have learned that nature and technology are not enemies, but rather strange bedfellows. Just watch as birds use tools.

We have learned to value the nourishment of an open and inviting culture that is respectful, honest and compassionate, but one that does not shy away from the brutal, uncomfortable, or strange. We have learned that this may be one of the most vital aspects of any learning environment.

We have learned from each other, we have learned from the past and present, we have learned from the work we make and experience, and we have learned from the world we share.

We have learned and we have created,
and I am better for it.

I hope that I may continue to be in
service to...